

Kia Ora Tatou

Before I begin I would like to acknowledge that Mr Thomas is in South America at the moment and is feeling a very long way from home. As our Principal he wishes he were here at this difficult time to offer his support and guidance. I have talked with him on the phone and he wishes to pass on his thoughts and prayers at this toughest of times.

This assembly has come about because a large number of innocent people were killed on Friday in Christchurch. This is an extremely unusual, hopefully unique event in New Zealand's history and one I felt needed acknowledging differently than normal. It has touched the soul of New Zealand, it has made us question our very identity individually and as a nation. In our time together I want to touch on just a few aspects of the tragedy in Christchurch, give those who need some help the necessary information to support that and to offer a few words towards the future.

The situation that occurred has led to many ordinary people doing extraordinary things – emergency service personnel risking their lives running towards the danger not away from it, doctors and nurses working above and beyond the call of duty, teachers staying in locked down schools into the evening with other people's children whilst worrying about the safety of their own whanau, people unable to return home because their houses were in the cordoned off areas. It is important for us to acknowledge their bravery, selflessness and grit.

We also have a role to play in the situation which is equally important. We need to manage ourselves and the responsible use of our devices. We need to **not** glorify the person who carried out this atrocity or give the negative side of this situation any oxygen. We need to be mindful of others and what they might be feeling and what connections they have to Christchurch and/or this event. Be a good friend.

I want to also acknowledge the work of our PM, Jacinda Ardern in this situation and would like to read you some of her comments over the weekend.

“This act on Friday 15 March was an act of extraordinary and unprecedented violence. It has no place in New Zealand.

We, New Zealand, were not a target because we are a safe harbour for those who hate.

We were not chosen for this act of violence because we condone racism.

We were chosen for the very fact that we are none of those things.

Because we represent diversity, kindness, compassion. A home for those who share our values. Refuge for those who need it. And those values will not and cannot be shaken by this attack.

We are a proud nation of more than 200 ethnicities, 160 languages. And amongst that diversity we share common values. And the one that we place the currency on right now is our compassion and support for the community of those directly affected by this tragedy.

“Many of the people affected by this act of extreme violence will be from our refugee and migrant communities. New Zealand is their home. They are us.

“The person or people who carried out this act of unprecedented violence are not. There is no place in our home for them”

“It is one of New Zealand’s darkest days.

“My thoughts, and I know all New Zealanders’ thoughts, are with those affected and with the people of Christchurch. Kia Kaha

I also read a twitter post over the weekend by TJ Perenara – the Hurricanes and All Blacks halfback that hit home, he said - kei te heke ngā roimata, kei te ngākau pōuri au, ka aroha ki a koutou. I

am so sorry this happened to you here. You should have been safe here, you should be safe everywhere. My heart is so heavy.

I know we ‘the Williams’ are not unusual in moving to New Zealand 12 years ago as immigrants in the hope of a secure and safe future for us and our Tamariki. New Zealand is, and always will be a place that welcomes diversity, it is a kind place that exhibits caring, peace and tolerance. People who move to New Zealand love this beautiful country and rightly so.

It is also no surprise that news agencies from around the world have been so surprised that such a situation could occur in New Zealand, and the shock has reverberated amongst these nations, that such an atrocity could occur in such an inclusive, peaceful and very regarded nation.

In times like these a number of us have connections to the event, we know someone involved and require the support and help of others. At Whangaparaoa College we have some of these support networks. Please all remember it is ok to feel emotions about this event – to be sad/anxious/angry/agitated, to feel numb, to want to ask questions to make sense of things, to want peace and quiet, want to talk about it etc. Support/provisions are being made for anyone who feels that they need it. There are people available to help. This includes somewhere quiet to go, access to our counsellors and so forth.

The future in New Zealand will absolutely need to continue to focus on inclusion, kindness and tolerance – they are the only future and they are our challenge! The good news is that these values can be clearly seen in a place like Whangaparaoa College and its learners. YOU and it is now, more than ever a time where these New Zealand values will need to be crystal clear, be acted upon and be grown still further. Inclusivity and kindness are the vital commodities that are needed to keep New Zealand strong, a place where we all feel safe, secure and where we all belong. Our turangawaewae. The place where we feel

especially empowered and connected. Our foundation, our place in the world, our home.

My final comment echoes this and was made by Governor-General Dame Patsy Reddy over the weekend, she said; "Now more than ever is the time to affirm the New Zealand values that we hold so dear - compassion, kindness and tolerance".

Thank you

Kia Kaha